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Loh Down Script Archives

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primate blushing

What's more important: food or sex?

When it comes to the evolution of color vision in primates, scientists just can't make up their minds.

Some say primates evolved the ability to see color to find food ...

Others think the ability evolved to help find mates. Ever seen a female chimpanzee's reddened rump or a baboon's VERY bright behind? That means she's. . . fertile and. . . Thanks forsharing.

So .. food or sex.. which is it?

Caltech theoretical neurobiologist Mark Changizi now says ... sex.

He says color vision not only allows potential mates to colorfully signal each other, but also lets them pick up emotional states-- blushing or getting pale from fear.

The key to skin-color changes is hemoglobin, the oxygen-carrying molecule in the blood.

More oxygen-- looks redder. Less oxygen--looks greener. Lots of hemoglobin equals bluer skin. Less? More yellow.

Changizi says our eyes' color-sensing cones are tuned to detect exactly those color changes. So a male monkey can tell if a female's face (or bottom) is flushed . . . in anticipation of. . . love...

In turn, she can use her color-sensing cones to ferret out nature's traditional mating warning signs like. . . plaid pants, a problem we had a Caltech way back in my day.. but .. never mind.

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